

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1635

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AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

AMCONSUL ZAGREB

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SUBJ: LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA IN PRAGUE, THE MUSICAL SIDE

1. THE LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, WITH ZUBIN MEHTA CONDUCTING, PRESENTED A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL CONCERT TO A STANDING-ROOM-ONLY AUDIENCE IN PRAGUE'S SMETANA HALL, DECEMBER 8.
2. THE 1,400-PERSON AUDIENCE INCLUDED THE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER, DR. DUSAN SPACIL, TWO DEPUTY MINISTERS OF CULTURE, AND A GOOD CROSS-SECTION OF PEOPLE FROM THE MUSICAL AND CULTURAL WORLD, INCLUDING SOME OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST PROMINENTLY KNOWN MUSICAL PERSONALITIES. IT WAS A WIDELY DIVERSE AUDIENCE, REPRESENTING SEVERAL STRATA OF CZECH SOCIETY. SOME OF THE LOUDEST APPLAUSE CAME FROM STUDENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE, THOSE IN THE CHEAPEST SEATS.
3. THE PROGRAM INCLUDED COPLAND'S THIRD SYMPHONY WHICH, DESPITE ITS NEWNESS FOR LOCAL AUDIENCES, DREW SIX CURTAIN CALLS FOR MEHTA. THE MORE FAMILIAR DVORAK'S SEVENTH SYMPHONY WAS EQUALLY WELL RECEIVED. MEHTA PRESENTED IT WITH DRAMATIC FLAIR, SIDED BY SUPERB SOLOISTS. HIS VERSION

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DIFFERED FROM THE SOFTER, MORE LYRICAL TREATMENT FAMILIAR

TO LOCAL AUDIENCES, BUT MUSICIANS AND CRITICS REGARDED IT AS A BOLD, IMAGINATIVE, AND CONVINCING INTERPRETATION.

4. THE ORCHESTRA PERFORMED THREE ENCORES, OVERTURES TO MOZART'S "MARRIAGE OF FIGARO," VERDI'S "FORTUNES OF DESTINY." AND SOUSA'S "STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER." WHEN THE FLUTE AND BRASS SECTIONS STOOD UP FOR THEIR SOLO PARTS IN THE LATTER, THE MUSIC WAS INTERRUPTED BY APPLAUSE, THE FIRST TIME THAT HAS HAPPENED HERE IN THE MEMORY OF MANY CONCERT GOERS. IN EACH INSTANCE, THE OVATIONS WERE LONG, ENDING WITH THE RHYTHMIC CLAPPING THAT MEANS A CZECH AUDIENCE LIKES THE PROGRAM.

5. SOME OF THE POST-CONCERT COMMENTS: A) FROM A PROMINENT CZECH PHYSICIAN, "YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO US TO SEE 'SPONSORED BY THE AMERICAN EMBASSY' ON THE PROGRAM AND TO SEE IT ON POSTERS AROUND TOWN. NOT IN YEARS HAVE WE SEEN SUCH A REAL PRESENCE OF THE UNITED STATES. THE 'STARS AND STRIPES' WAS A FANTASTIC ENDING." B) FROM A CZECH CONDUCTOR, "THEY ARE A YOUNG, FRESH ORCHESTRA, AND THEIR DISCIPLINED BOWING TECHNIQUE WAS A MARVEL TO BEHOLD. SO WAS THE UNITY WITH WHICH THE BRASS SECTION PLAYED. THEIR ENTHUSIASM CAUSED MANY PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE TO SMILE. THEY OBVIOUSLY ENJOY PLAYING TOGETHER, SOMETHING THAT IS NOT ALWAYS TRUE OF EUROPEAN ORCHESTRAS."

6. AMBASSADOR BYRNE HELD AN AFTER CONCERT DINNER AT THE EMBASSY RESIDENCE FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ORCHESTRA, HIGH GOVERNMENTAL OFFICIALS, AND SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS. IN HIS POST-DINNER TOAST THE AMBASSADOR RECALLED THAT, AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II, AT THE REQUEST OF THE THEN CZECHOSLOVAK FOREIGN MINISTER, JAN MASARYK, AMERICAN MUSICIANS SCoured NEW YORK FOR INSTRUMENTS FOR THE CZECH PHILHARMONIC, WHICH HAD BEEN LEFT DEVASTATED BY THE WAR. THE AMERICAN AIR FORCE TRANSPORTED THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS TO PRAGUE, AND MASARYK HELD A PARTY IN THEIR HONOR.

7. ZUBIN MEHTA, IN HIS RESPONSE, SAID THAT THE ORCHESTRA'S TOUR OF EASTERN EUROPE WAS A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL ONE, EQUALLY WELL RECEIVED BY CRITICS AND OVERFLOW AUDIENCES IN EACH UNCLASSIFIED

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CITY VISITED. THIS WAS MEHTA'S SEVENTH TRIP TO PRAGUE AS A CONDUCTOR.

8. LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS WERE CALLED BY THE ORCHESTRA'S MANAGER "THE SMOOTHEST WE HAVE HAD ON THE TRIP." CUSTOMS CLEARANCE TOOK LESS THAN AN HOUR, AND THE INSTRUMENTS WERE UNLOADED IN FIFTY MINUTES. HOWEVER, THIS WAS ONLY POSSIBLE BECAUSE THE EMBASSY WAS AHEAD OF THE DARK HAND OF

FATE BY ABOUT ONE HOUR AT A TIME. PRAGOKONCERT, THE TOUR'S OFFICIAL SPONSOR, COMPLETELY CAME APART AT THE SEAMS A WEEK BEFORE THE ORCHESTRA ARRIVED, AND THE MINISTRIES OF CULTURE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS WERE OF NO HELP, KEEPING PUBLICITY ON THE CONCERT TO A MINIMUM, AND RESPONDING TO REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE WITH LITTLE ENTHUSIASM. ONLY BY HAVING ADDITIONAL LOADING AND UNLOADING CREWS, BUSES AND TRUCKS WAITING IN RESERVE, AND MOVING THE ENTIRE P AND C SECTION AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF INTO THE CONCERT BUSINESS, DID THE OPERATION WORK. ONE EXAMPLE: P AND C'S ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY AND LIBRARIAN, FACED WITH THE JOB OF GETTING 117 PEOPLE INTO THEIR HOTEL ROOMS, SIMPLY SET UP A REGISTRATION DESK IN THE INTERCONTINENTAL LOBBY, COLLECTED PASSPORTS, GAVE OUT ROOM ASSIGNMENTS, AND COMPLETED THE PROCESS WITHIN AN HOUR.

9. IN A DECEMBER 9 MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHNOUPEK, THE AMBASSADOR MADE A POINT OF CITING THE MANY, OFTEN UNREASONABLE BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES THAT EMBASSY HAD TO OVERCOME IN SUPPORTING LAPO PROGRAM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA.

10. SEPARATE MESSAGES WILL FOLLOW ON THE ORCHESTRA'S PERFORMANCE IN BRATISLAVA, THE HORRENDOUS LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING THIS EXERCISE, AND THE POST'S CONSIDERED RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, "WAS IT WORTH THE TIME, EFFORT, AND COST?"
BYRNE

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